

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: From Aspirations to Access: The Role of Place in the Factors that Facilitate or Impede Postsecondary Education Attendance

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Using data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, this study presented an ecological approach to examining the individual, family, and school factors that facilitated or impeded postsecondary education attendance. Also, this study examined how place (i.e., rural, urban, and suburban) moderated the relations among certain individual and contextual factors and postsecondary education attendance. Historically, a core of factors including academic achievement, parent's educational attainment, parents' educational aspirations, and household income, has been consistently identified as predicting college attendance. In addition to those variables, this study revealed three additional factors, extracurricular activities, employment, and parents' educational aspirations for their student, which provided a unique contribution above that of the aforementioned core factors to the outcome of college attendance. The results also indicated that place did not moderate the relations among individual and contextual predictors and college attendance. However, in an exploratory analysis, a few factors were found to uniquely predict college attendance for students from each place (i.e.,

rural, urban, and suburban). By providing an understanding of the unique strengths and needs of students from rural and urban settings, the findings of this study may be used to inform the development of policies on higher education and intervention programs, such as the Higher Education Act, in order to ameliorate disparities in postsecondary education attendance among rural, urban, and suburban students.